

I Am Not My Number

4.00 GPA. 36 on the ACT. All 5's on AP exams. How often have you heard these numbers said at school? As high-achieving St. Andrew's students, we are expected to succeed in everything we do, especially in regard to academics. While this mindset can be helpful and encourages us to achieve great success and high standards, it can also become severely damaging. High expectations can quickly turn into detrimental obsessions. GPAs, standardized test scores, and the amount of AP classes do not define you as a person. So, what do these numbers actually mean?

"Those numbers are the easiest way for people to find the 'smart ones,'" Senior Amy Zhang said. "Being smart is a bit overrated on campus. We often think that we are so busy that we don't even have a little spare time to know each other. And since smartness here is often associated with higher grades, looking at the GPA becomes the easiest way for some people to value others."

As a school where "it's cool to be smart," St. Andrew's students are known for being high achievers and intelligent thinkers, but with these views, the students are also pushed to fulfill tall expectations from their parents, peers, teachers, and even themselves.

"Part of what I've found throughout my years in high school is that one of the few ways to receive recognition at this school is through grades and test scores," Senior Sameer Khan said. "Our environment is so dangerously competitive because we're trained to give primary credit to grades, test scores, and GPA and then reserve Speech and Debate success, girls' soccer accomplishments, or productive Mandarin Club fundraisers for texts in Rowdie."

Staying up past midnight to complete assignments has become the norm here, and it's detrimental for long-term mental health. It is much more beneficial for students to focus on their individual strengths and hobbies rather than defining themselves by a number. Pressure and impossible standards only lead to unhealthy habits, and it is much more valuable for St. Andrew's students to prioritize mental health and their own hard work.

"I think that what defines a person far more than his or her grades is the hard work he or she is willing to put in to achieve those goals," Sophomore Advikaa Anand said. "I see them as just that: a measure of their hard work. That's why it's hard when I put in the work for a grade and don't get it. I'm learning to value the effort I put into something over the results of that something."

Numbers can only mean so much, and the way in which students learn to prioritize dedication, passion, and enthusiasm over GPA numbers more accurately shows the capabilities of these people as humans instead of statistics.

"It's reductive to define someone by a grade in a class or some test score; people are capable of—and simply are—much more," Khan said. "We can't change this mentality until we actively show that it's not just the numbers that make St. Andrew's students so special."